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RHMFIS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFIS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 001246

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/25/2016

TAGS: PREL NATO MARR IT

SUBJECT: ITALY ON BOARD WITH NATO'S MIDDLE EAST SECURITY COOPERATION CENTER, BUT WARY OF PRESENTATION, TIMING

REF: A. STATE 63202

¶B. ROME 1182

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor David Pearce for Reasons 1. 4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Italy, a co-sponsor of the Middle East Security Cooperation Center (SCC) proposal, is fully on board with the concept but concerned about presentation. Italy believes the SCC must be fully co-sponsored with participating Middle East countries and does not favor launching it at the Riga summit. End summary.

¶2. (C) Pol-Mil Counselor and Pol-Mil Officer discussed Ref A demarche with head of the MFA NATO Office Gianni Bardini. While, Italy, as a co-sponsor of the SCC initiative, is fully on board with the concept, Bardini expressed concerns about the presentation. Noting that some Middle East/North Africa publics are not ready for a NATO presence, Bardini stressed the need for the Center to be fully co-sponsored ("regional buy-in") to avoid being seen as a "Trojan Horse" for NATO. He strongly advised against announcing the Center at the November Riga summit, arguing that the Center would then be perceived as something imposed by NATO rather than as a joint initiative. Instead, the Middle East states involved and NATO should issue a high-level joint political declaration (preferably at the Foreign Minister level) stating an intention to jointly develop plans for an SCC.

¶3. (C) Bardini stressed Italy's view that the SCC should be fully integrated with existing NATO and Arab training centers. Morocco's support for the SCC, for example, is only lukewarm because it already has a training institution and worries an SCC might divert attention, attendees or resources from its center. Bardini also said it would be important for the SCC to adopt a two-way approach, by providing courses, such as regional familiarization and language training, for NATO members.

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